

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **January 21, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, Millane, Paolillo, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe

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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg, Treasurer Carman

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- Members Absent: McLaughlin

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- The WC meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm by Chair Curtis.

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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the Minuteman budget update.

- ***Minuteman Budget Update***
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- Member Callanan: There are 16 towns in the regional network, of which Belmont is one. There is a complex assessment for determining the per-pupil cost for towns. Representative Brownsberger is looking to see how these assessments are formulated. More students from a particular town can result in a lower assessment. In FY09, Belmont has 31 students; for FY10 Belmont will have 33 students. The per-pupil cost is much higher than the Belmont public per-pupil cost. Part of the reason for this is that Minuteman does not have a Capital budget and the per-pupil cost includes capital projects. \$22,028 was the per-pupil cost for FY09; for FY10 it is \$23,666 per pupil (a 7% increase). \$17.4M is the total budget, which amounts to a 2.91% increase.

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- Member Widmer asked if local aid cuts would result in budget cuts for Minuteman. Member Callanan said that the Minuteman Superintendent indicated that additional money had been put in the E and D (Excess and Deficiency) account to be used to offset possible decreases in local aid. Chair Curtis said that the WC ought to invite the Minuteman Superintendent and Joe Scali to a WC meeting. As for FY09, Member Brusch noted that the WC budgeted \$716K and that the Minuteman actual budget appears to be \$781K, which amounts to a difference of \$65K. Member Callanan added that the Superintendent understands that these numbers are not sustainable and that they are looking to eliminating some programs. Chair Curtis noted that Minuteman's per-pupil cost is higher than any other vocational/technical school in the state. And that, he said, needs to be addressed. Why Minuteman is so expensive relative to its peers is something we need to understand. But to study this and come to an answer, Curtis continued, is a huge undertaking. The Minuteman budget has been murky and the new Superintendent said it would be more transparent.

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- BOS Chair Firenze: Minuteman schools are regionally organized. It makes sense to regionalize at the state level. All 16 members in the Minuteman contract say the path they are on is unsustainable. How do we take a leadership role in making this a state function? Member Allison noted that teacher salaries at Minuteman are \$10K higher than Belmont public and SC Chair Bowe added that the student/teacher ratio is much better than any community in the state, as well.

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- Chair Curtis reiterated the need to meet with the new Minuteman Superintendent.

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- ***Discussion of FY10 Town Budget (available funds)***

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- Chair Curtis said that he would like the WC to be taken through the town cuts. Town Accountant Hagg alerted the WC that the 10% local aid cut has not been factored in and that the town has much less revenue than anticipated. With regard to FY09, Town Administrator Younger said that the Governor will make further reductions known by next Wednesday (1/28/09). The next step, he said, will be to meet with the financial team, and with the school departments, to look at the numbers and come to a consensus on where to go for FY09. The October hiring freeze has helped, Younger continued, as vacant positions will not be filled. The town is down 9.7 FT employees. Further cuts in personnel as well as cuts to programs are possible if local aid is cut. The oil and fuel budget savings will get eaten up under local aid reductions, he said, and the library will have further reductions in hours. (But we still would like to keep our certification). Younger said that he is not anticipating any assistance from the federal stimulus package. The Capital budget has been reduced by \$400K, which will require more discussion. The town is going to have to adopt a “creative approach” as to how to deliver services given what funding is available. Consolidation will require personnel reductions in order to achieve any savings.

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- Chair Curtis asked how much the cuts add up to from a level service budget. Town Administrator Younger replied \$1.25M. Member Brusch noted that the “picture is fluid” and by March 2 (the override on ballot deadline), the WC may not know much. It will know the local aid reductions for FY09. Member Epstein asked if the fuel contract could be re-bid (to go lower). BOS Chair Firenze said that Assistant Town Administrator Conti will talk with Mr. Castanino to see how Belmont’s numbers (bids) compare with other communities. He cautioned, if prices start to go up, this could lead to a higher bid. It may be best to sign the contract as is or withdraw from the consortium. Conti added: All issues pertaining to the bid will be explored with Mr. Castanino, and that the present bid will not be “tossed out the window until we know we can do better”.

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- Chair Curtis: Next Wednesday we will know Belmont’s number from the state with regard to cuts and we will see the damage for FY09. For FY10, we will have to budget to a number that makes sense. Member Paolillo asked when the local aid number will be determined for FY10. Member Widmer replied that we should know by Memorial Day, but it could be as late as July 1st.

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- Member Callanan asked what are the next steps on consolidation? Chair Curtis replied that the WC Consolidation subcommittee is prepared to talk to the school department and the BOS regarding Facilities consolidation. Member Widmer asked if the OPEB account had \$150K budgeted in it for FY10. Town Accountant Hagg replied yes, as a level service amount. Member Widmer said that this ought to be a subject of discussion as it may be dubious to maintain that amount given the dire fiscal climate.

- Member Widmer raised the issue of the retiree medical care benefit. How much does the retiree health benefit cost? he asked. We cannot sustain this level of benefit for our employees, said Widmer, the numbers just don't work. BOS Chair Firenze said the if this were adjusted, the savings to the town would be significant. Member Allison added that the "retiree" definition includes people who are actively employed elsewhere, people who may still be in their 50s. Chair Curtis said that he and Town Accountant Hagg will report next week on that number.

Subcommittee Roles

- Chair Curtis said that the WC subcommittees needs to get energized to explore the budgets under their jurisdiction. Town Administrator Younger asked that, given the traditional Saturday morning hearings are not scheduled, when would the WC like to meet with various departments? Member Allison asked the WC to consider what a particular subcommittee is trying to accomplish. We know the issues and problems that face these departments right now. In fact, we know what these reports will actually say. Chair Curtis said that he does not want the subcommittee reports to simply regurgitate past year's report. Member Brusch noted that a comparison of Treasurers and Town Clerks from neighborhood communities needs to be undertaken. Member Widmer agreed, saying that we need to update the market survey of Treasurers and Clerks so that the WC can form a basis for a recommendation at TM. Member Paolillo said that he would like to hear what department heads have to say about the cuts that are happening within their departments.

- BOS Chair Firenze added that the Government Structure Committee is in the process of analyzing the organization of the town. The Government Structure Committee will report to the BOS on Monday. This information will help us figure out how to get where we need to be. Member Widmer said he is doubtful that there is much savings to be found in restructuring. The big savings money is in making changes to benefits and salaries. BOS Firenze agreed: "If we address how the town is organized, we may determine that it needs a lot less people to function". Member Brusch asked, how do we provide the department heads with a public forum? We need to put a face on the cuts and we need to hear the impact of these cuts from the department heads. We need to hear how they are going to manage with fewer resources.

- Chair Curtis asked the WC to think about what the utility is and what the ideal role is of the WC subcommittee.

Minutes of 11/19/08, 12/01/08 12/10/08 and 1/14/09

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- The minutes of 11/19/08, 12/01/08, 12/10/08, and 1/14/09 were approved. There was one abstention for 12/10/08 and 1/14/09.
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- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:18 pm.
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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary